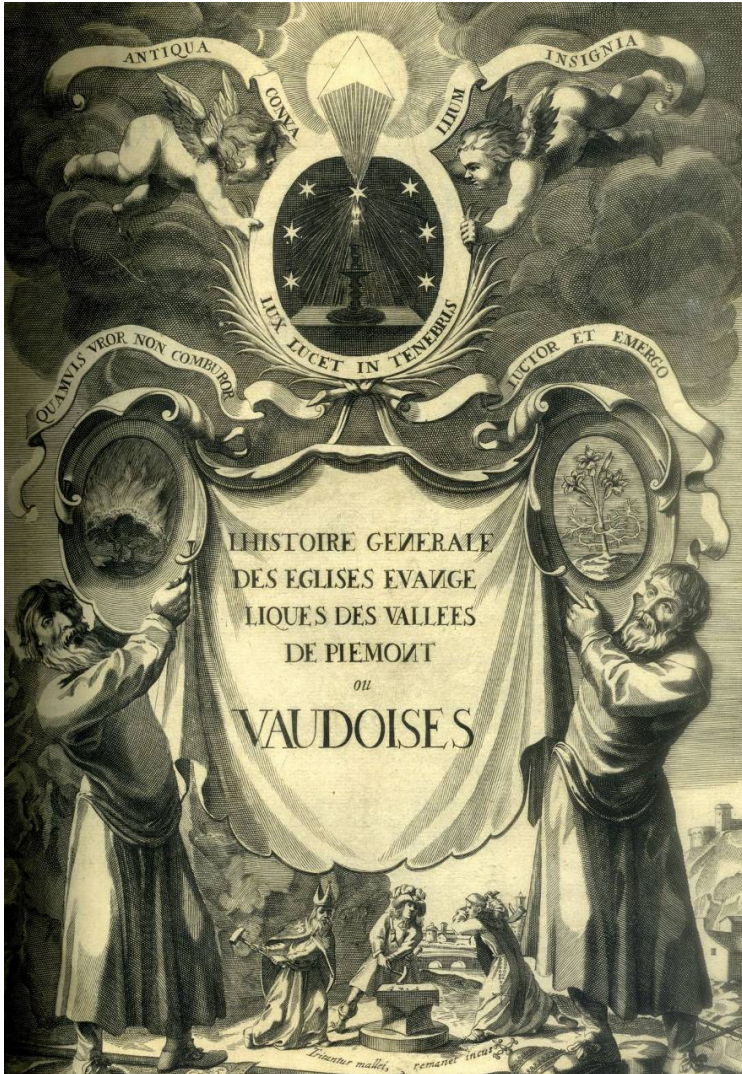


The Sectarized People of God

Lux Lucet in Tenebris



Senior Thesis
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*Dedicatum ad meum patrem, Francis Foucachon
et ad meum avum, Lucien Foucachon,
qui dederunt non solus librum, sed etiam hereditatem*



*Dédier a mon père, Francis Foucachon
et a mon grand-père, Lucien Foucachon,
qui m'ont donner non-seulement un livre, mais un héritage.*

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*Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered Saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese, that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learnt thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.*

- John Milton

Introduction

I am a descendent of the French Huguenots, and particularly of the brother of Henri Arnaud, Pastor of a Waldensian Church in the mid-seventeenth century.¹ A few years after the massacres of the winter of 1655, Henri Arnaud led a group of three thousand Huguenot troops across the Alps and reclaimed the valley of Lucerne from the hands of the Catholics. This is my personal connection to this history. I have inherited a book from my father and grandfather, written in 1669 by Pastor Jean Léger, moderator of the Waldensian churches. That book, divided into two sections, gives the history of the Waldensians from their early history to their persecutions in the 1660s. It is one of the most authoritative and comprehensive sources of Waldensian literature,² and a very rare manuscript.³

Thesis Question

Please discuss what if anything distinguishes a "people" from a "subculture," and "subculture" from a "sect." For example, are contemporary American denominations "culture-building" or "sectarian" or both? Feel free to use historical examples to illustrate your discussion.

¹ The tracing of my lineage to Henri Arnaud is not a completely provable thing, however my grandfather, Lucien Foucachon, did considerable research and concluded with a fair degree of certainty that we are connected the Arnaud's through my Grandfather's mother's line, the Convert's. In 2001 my family came into the inheritance of the ancestral farm house that had belonged to Jules Convert. The house now bears the name *Heritage Huguenot* on its gate.

² Gabriel Audisio, in his book "The Waldensian Dissent" argues that Léger's work is one among the three most important documents on Waldensian history and theology (p. 203). Audisio is the Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Provence, France, where the Waldensians were heavily persecuted for the time.

³ I found one for sale from a rare manuscripts dealer in Paris for several thousand Euros.

Purpose of Writing

I would like, in this thesis, to examine the Waldensians as a people, noting how they were “un-peopled” or “sectarized” by the Roman Catholic Church in the year 1170. I believe their story can teach us a lot of what it means to be a people, the importance of belonging to a people, and the effects of being “un-peopled.” I believe that the Waldensian story is, as Thucydides would put it, a story for all times. By studying the Waldensians we can study ourselves, particularly as Protestants. I will argue that the Waldensians are our ancestors in more ways than is commonly thought. I believe that their history was an important step in the preparation for the Reformation.

Chapter I

What is a People?

To begin, I will define people and subculture. Through these definitions I'll show that the two cannot be separated. Rather, a "subculture" is a subset of a "people". What then is a people? And how do the Waldensians fit within the categories of people and subculture? Dictionary describes a people as follows, "The entire body of persons who constitute a community, tribe, nation, or other group by virtue of a common culture, history, religion, or the like: the people of Australia; the Jewish people."⁴ A people therefore can be small (as in the case of a tribe) or great (as in the case of the people of the United States as a whole). The Christian church is the people of God, and as the Gospel spreads into all nations, many cultures will join the church. We do not speak, therefore, of the people of God as a separated kind of people from all the other peoples of the earth, but rather we speak of the way the people of God spreads into and affects all peoples, cultures, and subcultures (Rev. 11:15), for God has placed Christ's dominion over all the earth (Rev. 11:15)⁵.

If we look at the Bible, the people of God developed from its infant form before the birth of Christ to the eschatological people of God after His death and resurrection. The people of God began as the nation of Israel. All men that were part of the nation of Israel were the people of God. They had the sign of circumcision which was the sign of their inclusion into God's covenant. While this external sign

⁴ People. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/people> (accessed: October 28, 2008).

⁵ "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

was very important for Old Testament saints, we know that it served as an external sign of an inward grace. The Israelites were called to be circumcised in their hearts just as they were circumcised in their flesh (Jer. 9:26 ; Rom. 2:29).

With the coming of Christ, one no longer needed to join the Israelite nation to join the people of God. Rather membership among the people of God now means membership in the church. But who and what constitutes the church may be slightly harder to define. I believe the definition given by the Catholic dictionary, *New Advent*, describes it best:

The church, as has been seen, is a society formed of living men, not a mere mystical union of souls. As such it resembles other societies. Like them, it has its code of rules, its executive officers, its ceremonial observances. Yet it differs from them more than it resembles them: for it is a supernatural society. The Kingdom of God is supernatural alike in its origin, in the purpose at which it aims, and in the means at its disposal. Other kingdoms are natural in their origin; and their scope is limited to the temporal welfare of their citizens. The supernatural character of the Church is seen, when its relation to the redemptive work of Christ is considered. It is the society of those whom He has redeemed from the world.⁶

The church is the society of the redeemed in Christ. It is all those who belong to Christ. This particular definition will prove important later on when we explore the Waldensians in terms of the definition of a sect.

⁶ Joyce, George. "The Church." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 3. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 5 Nov. 2008<<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm>>.

What is a Sub-culture?

A sub-culture is a sub-set of a people, made up of the different characteristics found within that people. In the people of God, they are the different cultures which give Christianity its many flavors. It is sometimes the temptation of Christians to want a uniform “people of God” in which all the members have the same culture.⁷ This however, would destroy not only the beauty of the body of Christ, but also deny an important element that in fact makes it a functioning “Body.” Within a people there is often a smaller group that is given a specific kind of task. They are connected and part of the larger Body, but their task may sometimes make them look foreign to certain parts of the body. After all, a foot and hand, or leg and arm, know they are kin, but what about the nose! In the history of Christendom we have had our “noses,” and I believe we are often tempted to cut them off. Besides, there is no counterpart to the nose—surely it is out of place! Surely it is a heresy of the body! But the body has a nose, and the nose is important (in particular to the tasting of food). To bring my metaphor to good use, I believe that the prophets throughout the Old Testament were these “noses” that were so often outcast. And we read about a chief “nose” in the New Testament, one who ate locusts and wild honey, and wore raiment made of camel’s hair (Matt. 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1). He seems out of place. What was his purpose? To prepare the way for the Lord. This “nose” that seems so out of place, so irrelevant, was in effect a very important part of the foundation of Christ’s ministry. He was a herald of Christ.

In a similar vein, I believe that the Waldensians were the forerunners of the Reformation. But the Medieval Roman church

⁷ I am thinking of the examples of missionaries going into different cultures and spreading an American “brand” of Christianity, and expecting converts to act like American Christians.

rejected them. Perhaps they had read too much Aquinas, and could not account for that for which there is not an equal part. But, if all movements that were rejected by the church were part of the true church, then does that leave us with no answer as to what is a real sect? If a “nose” is part of the body, then what is a sect? It is a growth, a wart to be removed, but my analogy escapes me, and the proper definition of a sect awaits me.

Chapter II

Two Definitions of Sect

What is a Sect? ⁸

Now that I've put forward a definition of a people, and have settled the definition of a sub-culture within it, I would like to define sect. In my definition, I will distinguish between two kinds of sects: Voluntary sects, that is, those who depart from the church, and involuntary sects, that is, those who are "sectarized." When we typically think of sect, we think of the first kind: some errant, religious following that is heretical, closed to the outside world, and often following a charismatic leader. The dictionary describes it this way: "A Christian denomination characterized by insistence on strict qualifications for membership, as distinguished from the more inclusive groups called churches."⁹ While this definition is lacking, it does point out an important element of any sect, which is exclusiveness. A sect excludes itself from the larger body. It goes off and does its own thing. In a metaphor where we represent the people of God as a family, a sect would be like the errant child who goes and pouts instead of coming to the fellowship of the table. There are certainly examples of this kind of sect in the church's history.

⁸ Sect comes from the latin *sequi*, that is, "To follow."

⁹ Dictionary.com

The Cathars

The Cathars were contemporaries of the Waldensians in their early days. I would like to suggest that they were a sect in the most common and traditional sense of the word. They left the church to create their own group with its own heretical rites and practices.¹⁰ They were dualists, believing that the earth, and therefore all matter, was from Satan. They brought about a resurgence of the ancient heresy that St. Augustine rejected—that of the Manichaeans.¹¹ “All matter was accounted evil, including the cross on which Christ died, and the consecrated Host of the Eucharist...Opponents describe the Albegenses¹² as rejecting the sacraments...the Trinity, and the Virgin Birth; Christ was an angel, but not one with God.”¹³ “The Cathars lived completely apart from the Catholic church.”¹⁴ They were a wart. Both Catholics and Waldensians actively condemned this sect and heresy.

The Christian Sect

We, however, reach an unusual impasse when we realize that the most important sect in the history of the world has been the Christian sect. The Christian sect is a branching off of Judaism, which started out as a small following. Christians were treated as a “sect” of Judaism. Jesus was described by the Jews in 70-200 AD as follows, “Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel, who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, led the people astray, and said he had come neither to take away from the law of Moses nor to add to it.”¹⁵ Jesus was denied usage of the “synagogaes as a platform for his

¹⁰ Malcom Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 107.

¹¹ Ibid, 391.

¹² Same as “Cathars.”

¹³ Will Durant, *The Age of Faith, The Story of civilization: Part IV*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), 771.

¹⁴ Philp Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. V, 493.

¹⁵ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, (London: Doubleday, 1980), 165.

proclamation of the kingdom,” and he “had recourse, therefore, to the hillside or the shores of the Lake of Galilee...”¹⁶ This use of the term “sect” to speak about the early Christians suggests that an alternate definition of “sect” is necessary.

The “sectarized” sect

How else can we define “sect”? The Cathars fit clearly into the traditional definition of the word, but we know the Christian church should not fit into that definition. I would like to propose a second definition of a very different kind of sect. These are those who do not exclude themselves from a people, but rather are “sectarized.” What this means is that they have absolutely no desire to leave the Church, the body of believers, but on the contrary have a strong desire to see it built up and reformed. Central to this is the desire to stay united to the larger body.

The Waldensians

I believe the Waldensians represent this other sort of sect. The Waldensians, just like the early Christians, were also accused of suspicious behavior, like practicing magic, scorning the words of the Church, and leading people (especially poor illiterate people) astray. Just like the early Christians, the Waldensians, were forbidden to preach in places of worship. The Waldensians were “sectarized” by the Roman Catholic Church, though they had not wish to exclude themselves from the people of God.

¹⁶ F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 181.

Chapter III

The Waldensians, Sectarized

The Waldensians and the Church

Alistair McGrath, in his book *Christianity's Dangerous Idea—The Protestant Revolution* says this concerning the Waldensians,

The Waldensian movement represents an important historical link between early medieval reforming movements, which were predominantly moral in their agendas and biblical in their foundations, and the Reformation. Yet the fact remains that, until 1532, this movement saw itself as firmly embedded *within* the Catholic church, despite that church's official hostility toward its values and agendas.¹⁷

McGrath points out that they still considered themselves embedded in the church in 1532. This was after many years of bitter persecution. During their early years, they felt even more close to the church, their only grievance being that they were not allowed to preach freely. The Waldensians did not want to cause a church split. They had no desire to create a new church or denomination. They wanted reform within the church, and most of all, they wanted to have freedom simply to preach the gospel. Others testify on their behalf, “Valdes’s [Waldo’s] own influence was always exerted in favour of moderation, with an eye to the ultimate reconciliation with

¹⁷ Alistair E. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*, (Harper One: New York, 2007), 26.

Rome that he seems never finally to have ruled out.”¹⁸ Therefore they are very far from the former typed of sect which goes off to do their own thing. And yet, they were a sect— or rather, they were sectarized.

The Waldensians

The Waldensians contrast strongly with the Cathars in many ways. I’ve already shown that unlike the Cathars, they desired to remain in the church, and in an important sense, though sectarized, never really left. The Waldensians had a long, hard, and bloody history in the church. While their history spans (according to some¹⁹) from as early as the 4th century and Pope Sylvester, all the way through the Reformation and to the present day, they are most known by their most prominent leader, Peter Waldo, who is commonly credited as being the founder of the Waldensians. A rich merchant of Lyon, France in 1170 AD, Waldo started a movement similar to that of St. Francis of Assisi who came soon after Waldo²⁰, which emphasized the centrality of the Word, preaching to the poor, and taking vows of poverty in the tradition of the apostles. The Roman Catholic Church considered these Waldensians a sect.²¹ As I’ve already suggested, however, I think the Waldensians were not simply a sect, but “sectarized”. An examination of their history follows, with which I hope to support my claim.

¹⁸ Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy—Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 74.

¹⁹ I will be making the argument along with Jean Leger, writer of *Histoire Générale des Vaudois*, 1669, and moderator of the Waldensian churches during the mid 1600’s, that the Waldensians church goes back to the 4th century and Pope Sylvester.

²⁰ Henri Dubief, Jacques Poujol, *La France Protestante—histoire et lieux de mémoire*, (Paris : Les Éditions de Paris, 2005), 277.

²¹ Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy—Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 2nd ed., New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 77.

Early Waldensian History

How does the history of the Waldensians illustrate that they were sectarized? Let's examine the beginnings of this group to see how they related to the people of God. The Waldensians are generally said to have originated with Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant from Lyon, France. Bernard Gui puts an actual date on their founding: "The sect or heretical movement of the Waldensians or Poor of Lyons began in about the year of our Lord 1170."²² However this claim is disputed. There are actually three different theories as to the true origin of the Waldensians. The dispute of these origins sheds light onto how the Waldensians thought of themselves in regard to the Catholic Church.

The most commonly held view that the Waldensians come from a movement started by Peter Waldo, a Lyonnais merchant, records the following history:²³ Waldo was at a party with fellow businessmen when one of them dropped dead. This scared Waldo. He started to ask similar questions as those that Luther would ask almost 400 years later. At about this time, a traveling troubadour recited the song describing the life of St. Alexis, who was a beggar for Christ's sake. Worried about his salvation, he wondered what he must do to be saved. He went to scripture, and took literally the words of Christ which the troubadour has pointed out to him : "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell that thou hast and give to the poor." Immediately, he sold all he had, leaving a portion to his wife and daughters. Waldo

²² Bernard Gui, *De secta valdensium*, quoted in *The Waldensian Dissent—Persecution and Survival c.1170-1570*, by Gabriel Audisio, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1999), 10.

²³ He was a devout Catholic, married with two children. Stories of his life describe his comfortable lifestyle (but not opulent) and a father who taught his children the Catholic religion. One scene portrays his girl climbing the hill in Lyon up to the Basilica of Fourviere to pray to the Virgin. Taken from, *Waldo and the Waldensians Before the Reformation*, by Emilio Comba, Professor in the Waldensian Theological College, Florence, Italy. (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1880).

then gave the rest to the poor, and dedicated himself to the study of Scripture. Very soon after this, with the help of two clergy, he started translating the scriptures in the vernacular. He soon had followers whom he would send out, preaching the gospel to the neighboring towns. Therefore, “when the word of God was silent in the churches, it was heard on the squares and in the houses, as in the time of the apostles.”²⁴ It was soon after this that the church became suspicious of this teaching. The affair was brought to the pope in the Third Lateran Council in 1179.²⁶ It is important to note that Waldo attended this counsel, and defended his right to preach the gospel. This shows how from the beginning Waldo had no desire to become a different group, and did not want to be a “sect.” He was firmly a member of the Church of Christ. At first he was given the right to preach. Pope Innocent was suspicious of the accusation brought against Waldo by the bishop of Lyon, and was “anxious not to extinguish enthusiasm. He said that the ‘desire for understanding the Holy Scriptures and a zeal for preaching what is in the Scriptures is something not to be reprimanded but rather to be encouraged.’”²⁷ He did, however, assert that learned men ought to direct the handling of divine scriptures. Fairly soon after this, at the Synod of Verona in 1184, Waldo’s right to preach was revoked, and he was not allowed to preach without permission of the clergy in Lyon, for he had been lumped in the “same category with the Cathari and Patarines. Their offence was preaching without the consent of the bishops.”²⁸

Forbidden from preaching, the followers of Waldo had either to obey the Church or to obey Christ. While firmly holding onto the

²⁴ Emilio Comba, *Waldo and the Waldensians Before the Reformation*, (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1880), 17.

²⁵ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 5, (Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 494-495.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 495.

²⁷ Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy—Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 73.

²⁸ Philip Schaff, Vol. V., 496.

church as their own, they disobeyed her command, and determined to obey God rather than man. “For the disobedience a number of factors were responsible. One, to judge by later Waldensian writing, was the sense that Valdes²⁹ had a direct mission from God [to preach the gospel]...Fidelity to Scripture and the divine call seemed to require preaching. So the association was carried into schism.”³⁰ Waldo had to obey God *over* men, not *instead* of men. Philip Schaff remarks that “This was, perhaps, the first positive affirmation of a Scriptural ground for religious independence made by the dissenting sects of the Middle Ages.” Schaff continues, “[this affirmation of Scripture] contains in it, as in a germ, the principle of full liberty of conscience as it was avowed by Luther at Worms.”³¹ This determination to preach Christ whatever the cost marks the start of the “sectarizing” and persecution of the Waldensians.

In the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, the Waldensians went quickly from a group of church members preaching without permission to an actual sect and group of heretics. I believe this happened because the Roman church did not have a good method of labeling those who differed with them, even slightly. The Waldensians became lumped together with heretical groups like the Cathars. George Lambert, when he discusses heresies of the Medieval age, indicates that the Roman Church often grouped unauthorized preachers with heretical preachers: “The faithful are merely informed how heretics may be recognized by their unauthorized preaching, by their errors against the sacraments, or by declarations made by the bishops.”³² In Lambert’s list, the first crime against the church, unauthorized preaching, indicates no heresy, while the second two

²⁹ “Valdes” is another name for Waldo, closer to the French or Latin. Similarly, Vaudois is the French version of Waldensians.

³⁰ Ibid. 64.

³¹ Philip Schaff, Vol 5., 502

³² Ibid, 68. The Waldensians didn’t reject the Sacraments of the church in their early days as the Chathar’s did (who believed even the bread from Eucharist was evil “matter.” Later on the Waldensians rejected all but Baptism, the Eucharist, and Penance. Then with the Reformation, they maintained only Baptism and the Eucharist.

show more sign of definite error. So it was very easy, once called “unauthorized” to be un-peopled from the church by her members.

This determination of the Roman Catholic Church slowly led to the persecution of the Waldensians. At first, even though they were officially banned from preaching without permission, the clergy overlooked much of it, and a good portion of the lower clergy even appreciated them. In fact, Lambert says, “the populace approved their moral life; some lower clergy regarded them as auxiliaries and were sympathetic. Their preachers moved about freely, and were even invited to participate in debates which allowed expression to heretical and orthodox points of view.”³³ For this period they were officially prohibited from preaching, and therefore by their disobedience were out of favor with the church, but in practice they enjoyed the fellowship of the church. Throughout his life, Waldo continually sought for reunion with the church. He and his followers did not view themselves either as schismatics, sectarians, or of course, heretics. They believed that their excommunication from Rome was wrong, and sought to reverse it. “...Vaudès and his followers did not dispute ecclesiastical power outside the question of the excommunication which they deemed unjust.”³⁴ This later turned into further splitting from the church, as the Waldensians called into question other un-biblical practices of the Roman Church. “Gradually, as their condemnation became more effective, their reprobation was extended to other matters.”³⁵ Very soon they rejected many Catholic doctrines deemed un-biblical such as veneration of the saints, in particular the Virgin Mary. In the eyes of the Roman Church, this gave them the title of heretics. The Waldensians were sectarized.

³³ Ibid, 68. Lambert, the author of this book, in his preface describes his use of the word “heresy” to mean “whatever the papacy explicitly or implicitly condemned during the period.”

³⁴ Gabriel Audisio, trans. Claire Davison, *The Waldensian Dissent—Persecution and Survival*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 55.

³⁵ Ibid.

Chapter IV

The Waldensian Defense

Who's the Sect?

As time passed, the Waldensians went from being unauthorized, to being sectarized, to being considered an actual heretical sect by the Roman Catholic Church. They went through hundreds of years of marginalization and persecution. With the dawn of the Reformation, the Reformed Church, like their Waldensian brothers, were now being called a sect, as well as a novelty. In defense of the Reformers, as well as in defense of their own history, the Waldensians laid out their claim of antiquity. They stated that the Waldensian church, and the Reformed church by association, was not a novelty but rather that the traditions of Rome were the novelty. The Waldensian church was the real church which had not deviated from the true, pure, and apostolic faith.

The Early Waldensian Origins

In order to point out that the Waldensian faith (and therefore the Reformed faith) is not new, let us look at their origins. There are two other versions as to their origin to which I now return. These two are linked. The Waldensians came under the attack of the church for being a sect, and so these other stories of their origin together form a defense against this accusation. In one, it is said that the faith of the Waldensians did not begin with Peter Waldo, but on the contrary, can be traced back to the Apostolic age. In the other, which goes hand in hand with the first, the Waldensians are held to have originated from the region of Valdes, in the Piedmont region of the Alps. This version also suggests that Peter Waldo's name (often

referred to as “Valdès”) originated from these hills. He was simply “Peter the merchant” who became “Peter of the valley.”³⁶ The latter interpretation allows for the former.³⁷ The claim to antiquity, that is, to the Apostles, is different from that of the Roman Church. Jean Leger, in his *Histoire Générale*, speaks of the Inquisitor Reinerus Sacco, who wrote to the Pope concerning the danger of the Waldensian heresies. Leger uses this anti-Waldensian’s own testimony and research concerning the antiquity of the Waldensian church saying, “This Inquisitor in a book expressly composed to this purpose [of attacking the Waldensian faith], gleaned from the Jesuit *Gretferus* in the Library of the Fathers, cannot bring himself to deny that the Waldensians were from the times of the Apostles; his testimony is worth reproducing here in the original:”³⁸

Inter omnes sectas quae adhuc sunt vel ferunt, nulla fuit perniciosior Ecclesiae (dit-il, parlant de celle des Vaudois) quàm Leonistarum, idque tribus de causis, prima est quia est diuturnior omnium, aliqui enim dicunt quod duravit à tempore Sylvestri, aliqui à

³⁶ Vaude is a region of the Piedmont, currently northern Italy. This was the last stronghold of the Waldensians, and they currently inhabit the region. The “Canton de Vaud” (close by, currently in Switzerland), has some of the most conservative evangelical French pastors. Even Wikipedia states that the population is still overwhelmingly Calvinistic. Pastor Jean-Marc Berthoud is an example of a Vaudois pastor who stresses the importance of Christian education. Also related to this group is Vincent Bru, brother to my father’s associate pastor, who has theonomist and reconstructionist tendencies (a rare thing for France since it is mostly the other end of the spectrum).

³⁷ J.A. Wylie, in his book, *History of the Waldensians*, argues that in the 1100’s men did not go by surnames, but were known just by their forename, such as “Peter of the Valley” or “Peter the Merchant.”

³⁸ Jean Leger, *L’Histoire Generale des Eglises Evangeliques des Vallees de Piemont ou Vaudoises*, (Leyde, France : Jean le Carpentier, 1669), Book I, 169. All translations Daniel Foucachon, 2008. *Cét Inquisiteur dans un Livre exprès qu’il a composé sur ce fuget, rapporté par le Jesuite Gretferus en la Bibliotheque des Peres, n’a pas le front de nier que les Vaudois ne soient dès le tems des Apôtres ; son témoignage merite d’estre icy transcrit de mot à mot en original.*

*tempore Apostolorum ; secunda quia Generalior, ferè
enim nulla est terra in quâ haec secta excepta non fit ;
tertia quia cum omnes aliae secta immanitate
blasphemiarum in Deum audientibus horrorem
inducant, haec magnam habet speciem pietatis, eò quòd
coram hominibus iustè vivant, & benè omnia de Deo
credant & omnes articulos qui in Symbolo continentur
observant, solummodo Romanam Ecclesiam
blasphemant, & clerum : cui multitudo laïcorum facilis
est ad credendum.³⁹*

There are several things to highlight from Sacco's writing. First of all, he is one among several ancient sources who said very similar things—this was not an isolated case.⁴⁰ Secondly it sheds light on the nature of their sectarization. Even according to Catholics, they “believe nothing of God other than the things that are proper to believe, and hold to the all the articles of the Creed.”⁴¹ They were not a heretical movement, and lived lives of piety. As Cameron put it, “The most important lesson of the first phase of the Waldensian story is that it was a minimally unorthodox movement, stubborn only in its

³⁹ Ibid : From Leger's French translation of the Latin : « Of all the sects which are or which have ever been, there has never been one more pernicious to the Church than that of the Vaudois, and that for three reasons. The first is that it is the most ancient of all [sects], for some say that it is from the times of Sylvester, and others attribute its origin from the times of the Apostles. The second reason is because it is [the sect] that has spread more than others, for there is barely a region in the world where [the Waldensian sect] has not penetrated. The third reason is that, unlike the other sects who give honor first to those who hear their pernicious dogmas, by horrible blasphemes that they vomit towards God, these [Waldensians] seduce the world by their appearance of great piety, and by living honest lives in the world. *They believe nothing of God other than the things that are proper to believe, and hold to the all the articles of the Creed.* The only bad thing they seem to do is that they blaspheme the Roman Church, and through this bring to their faith much of the “little people” [non-clergy, illiterate].»

⁴⁰ Leger's book covers many of these, many of them anti-Waldensian Roman clergy.

⁴¹ Ibid.

insistence on unrestrained lay preaching, which was driven into permanent, structured heresy by a jealous and distrustful *local* church hierarchy.”⁴² And third and most importantly, this answers the accusation of Rome towards the Reformers that the Reformation was a novelty. The Papist Costerus writes in his book *ecclesia* that, “there has never been anyone in the inhabitable world, before Martin Luther, that is to say, before the year 1517 of Jesus Christ our Savior, who had the Belief, Faith, or the Religion, of them who now follow the sects of Luther, nor Calvin.”⁴³ But Léger responds by referencing the fact that the Waldensian faith accords itself in perfect unison with the Reformed faith of Luther, Calvin, and the Reformation in General⁴⁴,

Certainly, since these Men of Rome give such a grand number of illustrious testimonies of the antiquity of the Doctrine of the Waldensians, such as those we examined in the preceding chapter, they will need to manifest that the [doctrine] of the Protestants is not the same if they want to make it out to be something new, or, if they acknowledge it to be the same, and that [therefore] it only amplified the times of Luther and Calvin, then that they cease reproaching us of being a novelty.⁴⁵

⁴² Euan Cameron, *Waldenses : Reflections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, 2000), 59.

⁴³ Léger, *Histoire Générale*, Book I, 175. «...il n'y ût jamais perfonne dans tout le monde habitable, devant Marthin Luther, c'est-à-dire, devant l'an 1517 de Jefus Chrift nôtre Seigneur, qui ait eû la Creance, la Foy, ou la Religion, que fuivent maintenant les Sectateurs de Luther, ni de Calvin. »

⁴⁴ Léger had in previous pages compiled several letters from different reformers advocating the orthodoxy of the Waldensian faith. Among those Reformers were Martin Luther, Philippe Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, and George Morel. Book I, pp. 104-105.

⁴⁵ Léger, book I, 175. « Certainement, puis que Meffieurs de Rome rendent fi grande multitude d'illuftres témoignages à l'antiquité de la Doctrine des Vaudois, tels que font ceus que nous venons d'examiner au chapitre precedent, if faudra qu'ils montraffent que celle des Proteftans, n'eft point la même, pour le faire paffer pour

As I pointed out earlier, quoting McGrath, the Waldensians are the Reformation's link to the early church. Léger is not only asking the question of whether the Waldensian (and Reformed) faith fits into the church, and thus the people of God, he is pointing out the way in which the Roman church, in spite of their gift of lineage, is not the *true* lineage of Christ and his Apostles. The Church does not need the formal organization that Rome has, even if that is a gift of God. The Waldensian confession praises an established church. An established church is important, but not the *sine qua non* of the people of God. Israel in Egypt and wandering in the desert should be proof enough. Article VIII of the Waldensian confession praises the "Holy Catholic Church" as a means of grace. It defines the church as "wherever Jesus is preached, wherever is the practice of his Word, and his Sacraments, and if they administer these according to His ordinance, there is the Holy Church, and the People of God, whatever be there number." However that same confession says, "But where Christ is not, and where the Word is rejected, there can be no true Church, nor the people pleasurable to God."⁴⁶ Léger speaks of the Roman Church in terms of having lost that faith. He claims that it is the Traditions of Rome that are new, and not the Reformed faith. The church can be "disrobed in the sight of men" but it can never lose its being, just as a body can never lose its soul.⁴⁷

nouvelle, ou s'ils avoient que c'est la même, & qu'elle n'a fait que s'amplifier d'avantage du tems de *Luther*, & de *Calvin*, qu'ils ne nous reprochent plus la nouveauté. »

⁴⁶ Léger, Book I, 100. « Car par tout où Jêsus est prêché, par toute où se pratique la Parole, & ses Sacremens, & qu'ils s'y administrent & reçoivent selon son ordonnance, là est la Sainte Eglise, & le Peuple de Dieu, quel que soit leur nombre : mais où Chrift n'est point, & où la Parole est rejetée, là ne peut estre la Vraye Eglise, ni le Peuple agreable à Dieu. »

⁴⁷ Léger, book I, 176. "derobée à la veuë des hommes. »

Chapter V

The Implications of a Sectarized Church

What is lost in the process of Sectarization?

At the beginning of this thesis, while developing a second definition of sect, I mentioned how Christianity was a kind of Jewish sect. The danger of this perspective comes from describing sect as something that is good. If Christianity is a sect, then don't we want to be one? But of course Christianity is not a sect, though at one point it could be considered a sect of Judaism. It grew out of that. The man who was considered the leader of this sect, Jesus Christ, is King of all kings, and all authority in heaven and on earth has been bestowed to Him. He, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, form the Trinitarian community of the God-head which is the exact opposite of a sect. All those who call upon Him in evangelical faith are invited into that community. This appeal to the ultimate Community should always be the basis for any particular community to dissent from a larger community.⁴⁸ We might say that Christ sectarized Himself on the cross that He might un-sectarize us, that He might bring us into His people. He was un-peopled that we might be peopled. This sheds better light onto Jesus' words on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

We do not desire to be un-peopled. The essence of the gospel is fellowship with God, that is, to be part of His people, to be brought into His fold. The church is the bride of Christ. To be sectarized from the church is to be divorced—a kind of excommunication. But what

⁴⁸ Similarly, the Trinity is not an issue of orthodox diversity. To deny the Trinity is the essence of being un-peopled. It is by the doctrine of the Trinity that we understand our perichoretic relationship with the God-head and are "peopled" into God.

if the people of God have fallen from grace? What if the Church is no longer the true church of Christ? What if it has abandoned the faith in a corporal sense? What does excommunication from that body do to the Christian? Certainly, if that body has forfeited the keys of the kingdom, it does not endanger his communion with God, nor blot his name out of the Book of Life. However there is a loss. When the Waldensians were removed from the church, there was a certain element of re-starting. They had to grow their people back from scratch, and survive rather than thrive. Philip Schaff speaks of the nature of the Waldensians church as a “dissent.” Because they were sectarized, they became a “side current” in the big picture of the church.

Interesting as [the Waldensians] are in themselves and by reason of the terrible ordeals they were forced to undergo, the sects were side currents compared with the great stream of the Catholic church, to which, with all its abuses and persecuting enormities, the credit belongs of Christianizing the barbarians, developing learning, building cathedrals, cultivating art, furnishing hymns, constructing theological systems and in other ways contributing to the progress of mankind.⁴⁹

When a group of people are separated from the larger group, they are less able to accomplish what they would normally do in conjunction with a larger group. They are in survival mode. They were like Israel in the desert. “They understood that their Church, also, was in the Desert like those of the times of the pilgrimages [of Israel].”⁵⁰ In fact a famous book on the Waldensians is entitled, *Israel of the Alps* and speaks of the Waldensians in terms of exile.

⁴⁹ Schaff, Vol. 5, 469.

⁵⁰ Jean Groffier, *Le Feu Ardent des Vaudois*, (Aix-en-Provence, France: Édusud, 1981), 43.

Another aspect is that, having been sectarized by the church, the Waldensians became a suspicion. Many associated them with witches. “Towards the beginning of the fifteenth century, the word *vauderie* or *vaudoiserie* appeared, meaning sorcery, and *Vaudois* was used to mean sorcerer.”⁵¹ Therefore even today, their faith is less prevalent in Christian history. If it were not for Sir Morland, who brought Léger’s book to Cambridge and Oxford, far less would be known about the tenacity of the Waldensian faith. How different this is than, for example, St. Francis of Assisi, who in reality was very close to the early Waldensians in theology, and who lived shortly after them. Schaff believes that St. Francis was influenced by the Waldensians: “Francis d’Assisi took up with this ideal [of apostolic poverty] and was perhaps more immediately the disciple of the obscure Waldensians of Northern Italy than can be proved in so many words.”⁵² And yet the theology of Francis of Assisi, his famous prayer, and his life is immediately thought of as orthodox, and a wonderful legacy of the Church. The Waldensians are so even more, but a few centuries of persecution by the church gives us the necessity of first defending them, and then propagating their wonderful legacy. The Waldensian faith remained a minority for three centuries due to their sectarization and subsequent persecution.

Therefore the Waldensians did not accomplish great feats, build great cathedrals, or write many books. A lot of these things the Roman church did. But the Waldensians did leave the best gift to humanity: the foundation stones of the Reformation. They paved the way for the Reformation as John the Baptist paved the way for Christ. John the Baptist was calling for a baptism of repentance. The

⁵¹ Gabriel Audisio, trans. Claire Davison, *The Waldensian Dissent – Persecution and Survival c.1170-c.1570*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 74.

⁵² Schaff, Vol. V, 506. Schaff says in the footnote that “Francis of Assisi in his work was moved by “the idea deeply rooted in his age,” quoting Felder, a Roman Catholic author.

Waldensians were calling for a return to the evangelical simplicity of the apostolic faith. Their call too, was a call to repentance.

Heresy and Literacy

Connected with being attached or not attached to a larger established church, or to the larger “People of God” is that there are fewer opportunities for the checks and balances regarding heresy. It is easier to stray, in honest zeal, towards error. The Waldensians were not heretics; however they were not either without error. In fact, with hindsight, we can see that the early Waldensians harbored several errors of the Catholic Church. There is a sense in which they were not radical enough, and yet, due to the context, I believe they were doing the right thing by not wanting to leave the Catholic Church, Catholic doctrine included. The Roman Church of this period had not strayed as far as they would in the next few centuries; therefore it was easier for them to stay close to the Church and its doctrine. I can do nothing but praise this action. “[The Waldensian] adherents remained faithful to Valdes’s wish; they never wholly rejected the sacraments of the Catholic priesthood and they declined to offer the Church the radical challenge of the Poor Lombards.”⁵³ The Lombards that Malcolm is referring to questioned every tenant of the Roman Church.

[The Waldensians] did not press on, as the Lombards did, to subject all practices of the Church to stern examination in the light of Scripture and the pattern of the early Church. If critical of the Roman hierarchy and priesthood, they had still not unchurched them. The Lombards had, and pressed the other to do the same.⁵⁴

⁵³ Malcom Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 161.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 95.

This is yet another example of the Waldensians apprehension towards leaving the established church. And those fears are not unfounded.

The twelfth century became known for its traveling preachers, many of which were the Waldensians, preaching an evangelical and apostolic faith. But mixed in with this were other preachers who were following suit, but had been influenced by various heresies. “What made the heresy of the twelfth century insidious was its relatively unformed nature, its lack...of concise dogmatic positions...”⁵⁵ An additional complication existed due to the lack of books. Most theology (except that of the Roman Church) was oral and therefore nebulous in nature at times. It is hard to pin down an argument that is never “officially” stated. Therefore to have illiterate preachers was somewhat of an incubator for popular heresy.

The Waldensians were accused of being illiterate, and in a large part, they were. Because their understanding of the apostolic lifestyle was one of poverty, it meant that they had not a great many books and works of literature. But it is not quite accurate to say that the Waldensians were illiterate. They were experts at the most important piece of literature given to mankind: the Bible. A book titled *Heresy and Literacy* points out that “Waldensian piety’s] sole point of orientation is the bible, ‘the Book of Books’; consequently, a literary document, and hence literacy is the foundation stone of Waldensianism.”⁵⁶ Like many things, this is at once a benefit and a danger to the Waldensians. They preached in reaction to abuses of the church which had become unfaithful.

Let’s step back to that point I made earlier, that Christianity was a Judean sect. It was in fact a new beginning. The old order was “passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31). With whom did God choose to establish

⁵⁵ Ibid, 40.

⁵⁶ Peter Billier & Anne Hudson, *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 112.

His new church? Where were the catalysts of the Kingdom of God? It was not members of the well established, liturgical, and “official” Sanhedrin, but rather laymen: mostly fishermen. It seems that God takes pleasure in such humble beginnings (1 Cor. 1:27). Because the church was in need of Reformation, I believe it was necessary to go back to the basics. As I stated above, the downside to being sectarized is that you don’t have an established church. But as Doug Jones points out in the preface of *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, “In a healthy church, those forms are good and holy. But to have turned to the Sanhedrin at *that* time would have been to embrace apostasy. Truth, beauty, and goodness were with the fishermen.”⁵⁷ I believe the same thing concerning the Waldensians. Yes, the goal is a more mature church, and a greater literacy among the people of God. But the Waldensians, like John the Baptist, were paving a way for Reformation.

What is gained through being Sectarized?

We have just looked at the down-sides of beings sectarized, but also how God uses even sectarization to bring about His kingdom. I will now look at the legacy of faith which the Waldensians have left us. We have stated that being sectarized prepared the way for Reformation, but the Waldensians were not just fore-runners. They in themselves are also an incredible example of faithfulness. Their simple faith, based on the Word, made the Waldensian communities strong and ready to face opposition, with which their history was paved. We have already mentioned how the Scriptures were central to their doctrine, but it was also central to their lives. It was not only their doctrine that was pure—their lives reflected their doctrine. Léger says,

⁵⁷ Keith A. Mathison, *the Shape of Sola Scriptura*, (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2001), 12.

It does not suffice that we be convinced of the purity of the Doctrine of the Waldensians...if life does not correspond to doctrine; it is nothing but bronze which rings, and a clanging cymbal. It is to have the voice of Jacob, and the hands of Esau, to destroy with one hand what has been built with the other. Woe to them (just as Christ reproached the Jews) *who say and do not*. Far from being saved by their words, they only increase and hasten their own condemnation...Faith works through charity: it behooves not to the hypocrite to glory in his Faith, if he has not works. *Faith without works is dead.*⁵⁸

The Waldensians were renowned, as the Huguenots were later, for their piety of life. Even their opponents speak of their piety and good works. J. A. Wylie remarks, "the blamelessness of the Waldenses passed into a proverb, so that one more than ordinarily exempt from the vices of his time was sure to be suspected of being a Vaudés."⁵⁹ They were known for being of one mind, for living simply, for speaking the truth, and living in godly community.⁶⁰ While the Catholics would not intermarry with the Waldensians because of their "heresy," Catholic Gentlemen and Lords preferred Waldensians as servants to Catholics because of their virtue.⁶¹ In 1572, the year of the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, an order went out from the

⁵⁸ Léger, Book I, 181. « *Il ne fuffit pas que nous foyons convaincus de la pureté de la Doctrine des Vaudois...fi la vie ne correspond point à la Doctrine, ce n'est que l'airain qui raifonne, & la cymbale qui tinte : c'est avoir la voix de Jacob, & les mains d'Efau, détruire d'une main ce qu'on bâtit de l'autre : malheur à ceux (comme le reprochoit Chrift aux Juifs) qui difent & ne font pas, bien loin d'estre fauvés par leurs paroles, elles ne font qu'accroître, & hâter leur condamnation...la Foy eft ouvrante par charité : il n'appartient qu'à l'hypocrite de fe glorifier d'avoir la Foy, s'il n'a pas les œvres, la Foy fans les œvres eft morte.* » Italics original, indicate scripture reference.

⁵⁹ J. A. Wylie, *History of the Waldenses*, 17.

⁶⁰ Léger, *Histoire Générale*, Book I, 184.

⁶¹ Ibid, 185.

King to “promptly cut the throats of all the leading Waldensians among their government.”⁶² This was met with protest by the members of a counsel composed of both important politicians and churchmen who stated that the report concerning the Huguenots (the local Waldensians) was false, and that they were good men, who lived at peace with the Catholics in all honor, and that they were faithful to the service of the king.⁶³ They sent a letter the king, asking that he verify their claims to pure doctrine, and true faith. Here is the result:

The king therefore sent... William Parui, a Dominican and Doctor of the *Sorbonne*, and his Confessor. These men having visited the Parishes of the Waldensians, and their Temples, found no Images, no any trace of the service of the Mass, no any utensils of Ceremonies that were in use among the Catholics. Also, have done a detailed search into their way of life, and the crimes that had been brought against them. Neither did they hear nor see even a shadow [of those things they had been accused of], but on the contrary, it became evident that they were very pious, observing the Sabbath, that they baptized their children according to the custom of the primitive Church, that they were perfectly well instructed in the Doctrine of the Apostles Creed, and of the Law of God.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid. « *promptement couper la gorge à tous les principaux d'entre les Vaudois de son Gouvernement.* »

⁶³ Ibid. The spokesman for these men who wanted to save the Waldensians lives was Monsieur Archi-Doyen, a man from among the « *Ecclesiastiques.* » Their complaint was heeded, and the Waldensians were not massacred. Léger continues by lamenting that the successor to the throne in that Dukedom (Savoy), Frederic II, was not as honest and just a man.

⁶⁴ Léger, Book I, 187. « *Le Roy leur envoya donc... Guillaume Parui Dominicain, Docteur de la Sorboone, & son Confesseur : Ceux-cy ayans visté les Paroiffes de Vaudois, & leurs Temples, n'y trouverent point d'Images, n'y remarquerent aucune trace du service de la Messe, ni aucun appareil des Ceremonies qui estoient en usage*

The response of the King was, “*Jure-jurando affirmavit Valdenses illos esse Francorum omnium optimos.*”⁶⁵

Another benefit of being sectarized is that it created the necessity to internalize the Word, thus helping it to remain close to the heart and mind. They also transmitted this to their children, thus maintaining the line of the covenant from generation to generation. Because they could have their Bibles confiscated at any time, they often memorized large portions of Scripture. One man gave testimony that he heard a Waldensian boy recite the entire book of Job without missing a word,⁶⁶ and many knew the entire New Testament by heart, and good portions of the Old.⁶⁷ Learning most of the New Testament was a requirement for being a Waldensian pastor.⁶⁸ Like the Bereans, they refused to listen to any preaching that was not backed up by the Old or New Testament.⁶⁹ Not only did they memorize the bible, but they internalized it through song: “The Waldensians, like the Protestants after them, would sing psalms at work, going to the fields—everywhere.”⁷⁰ The Waldensians were a people of evangelical

parmi les Catholiques. Ayant auffi fait une exacte recherche de leur vie, & des crimes qui leur estoient imposés ; ils n'en ouïent ni n'y virent pas seulement l'ombre, tout au contraire, il parut clairement qu'ils estoient tres-pieux observateurs du jour du Dimanche, qu'ils baptisoient les Enfants selon la coutume de l'Eglise primitive ; qu'ils estoient parfaitement bien instruits en la Doctrine de Symbole des Apôtres & de la Loy de Dieu. »

⁶⁵ Ibid. That is, that the king « affirms with an oath that these Waldensians are the best among all the French. »

⁶⁶ Léger, *Histoire Générale*, Book I, 188.

⁶⁷ In a book entitled, *The Huguenots*, by Samuel Smiles, it says, “The Vaudois peasantry knew the Bible almost by heart. Raids were from time to time made into their district by the agents of the Romish Church for the purpose of seizing and burning all such copies of the Bible as they could lay hands on. Knowing this, the peasants formed societies of young persons, each of whom was appointed to preserve in his memory a certain number of chapters; and thus, though their Bibles were seized and burnt, the Vaudois were still enabled to refer to their Bibles through the memories of the young minds in which the chapters were preserved.”

⁶⁸ Ibid, 191.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 189.

⁷⁰ Jean Groffier, *Le Feu Ardent des Vaudois*, 31.

faith. Tertullian's wrote that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." A seed was sown, and a church grew. The Waldensians soon grew into that Church, and were once again united to her People.

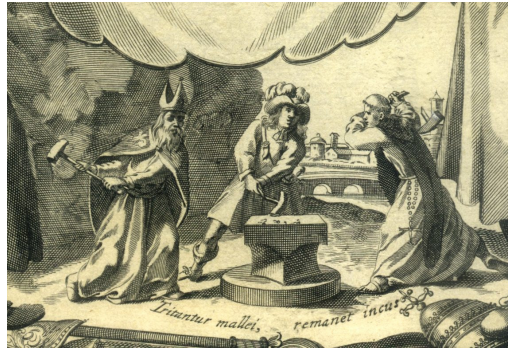
Chapter VI

Reformation Waldensians

The Coming of Reformation and the Reversal of Sectarization

The cover photo of this thesis comes from the inside cover of Léger's book. That image alone represents much of the essence of Reformation Waldensianism. *Lux Lucet in Tenebris*, is a picture of the emerging Waldensian Church. For several hundred of years, they were a small light shining in the darkness of Papal idolatry and error. Finally, though, the forerunners of the Reformation were un-sectarized. They were churched and peopled.

Post Tenebras Lux. They endured through centuries of hardship, and kept the faith.⁷¹ That is what is represented by the three men hitting the anvil. The inscription underneath is, "*tritantur mallei, remanet incus*," (the hammers may hit, but the anvil remains). The three men represent the Pope, the Priests/Monks, and the Inquisitors breaking their hammers on the "anvil of the faith" of the Waldensians.



Taken from Léger, *Histoire Générale*

"*tritantur mallei, remanet incus*," (the hammers may hit, but the anvil remains). The three men represent the Pope, the Priests/Monks, and the Inquisitors breaking their hammers on the "anvil of the faith" of the Waldensians.

But the Waldensians, now reunited to their people, no longer fight as a sectarized group. They are now a subculture of the French Huguenots, the French Protestants. They are the venerable "nose" of the Protestant Reformation.⁷²

⁷¹ Léger claims that eight hundred thousand Waldensians were killed throughout their entire history in various parts of France and Europe. Léger, book I, 177.

⁷² See chapter 1. They are the venerable "nose" of the Reformation. But stay, what say I? Their venerable nose is a rock, a peak, a cape! No, more than a cape: a peninsula! (see: Cyrano de Bergerac).

The fact that the Waldensians were grafted back into the larger people of God at Reformation bears credence to my thesis that they were sectarized, and not a simple sect. But what are the signs of them being grafted back in? How “Reformed” and “Protestant” were the Waldensians?⁷³ A Roman Catholic, Eccius, in the 28th chapter of his book, reproaches Luther that he had done nothing but renew the heresies already condemned of the Waldensians, of the Albegenses, of Wycliffe, and of John Hus.⁷⁴ Theodore de Beze writes of the Waldensians having “preserved the true Religion, without ever allowing themselves to be completely perverted par any temptations.”⁷⁵ Martin Luther, in a letter to the Waldensians praises them for their tenacity in persecution throughout the ages, and for meditating on the Scriptures day and night, being well versed in scripture, something he had not seen in the “church of the Pope.”⁷⁶ Philippe Melanchthon also wrote to the Waldensians in 1533, mentioning that they agreed on all the principle points of the Christian Faith, and that they “reciprocally and amiably embraced each other’s [faith and doctrine].” Their only point of divergence was on church discipline.⁷⁷ And Bucer wrote of them praising their faith and discipline, as well as the way in which they stood up to persecution. He also praised their “ministers of the Word and

⁷³ Léger mentions that the faith of the Waldensians had not changed in any significant manner from their early time to the Reformation except concerning the use of arms for self-defense. The early Waldensians believed that killing is an absolute prohibition. With the Reformation, their views on this changed. Thus we have great men like Joshua Ganavel, and Henry Arnaud fighting the against their persecutors. Léger, Book I, 205.

⁷⁴ Léger, Book I, 176.

⁷⁵ Léger, Book I, 167. « *qui ont toujours conservée la vraye Religion, sans jamais se laisser entierement pervertir par aucune tentation &c.* »

⁷⁶ Léger, Book I, 104.

⁷⁷ Léger, Book I, 105. « *que nous nous sommes reciproquement & amiablement embrassés.* » Melanchthon believed that the Waldensians were being too strict in their views on church discipline, but that it was a minor issue, and not one that ought ever to break any kind of fellowship.

Sacraments” who were “very excellent in prudence and somber spirit” and encouraged their brothers where their faith lacked.⁷⁸

These are a few of the testimonies of the foremost Reformers concerning the Waldensians’ orthodoxy. They were one and the same with Reformed Church. Over the course of a few years, having sent delegations to find out more about Reformed theology, and after two synods, the Waldensians officially accepted the Reformed faith as their own. It was soon after that, with the help of Farel (the French Reformer), that the Waldensians produced the first French bible in 1535.⁷⁹ Why was it so easy for the Waldensians to become Reformed? As I hope I have sufficiently demonstrated, it is because their faith was virtually the same.

⁷⁸ Léger, book I, 105. « *les Ministres de la Parole, & des Sacremens...d’hommes tres-excellens en prudence & gravité d’esprit...* »

⁷⁹ Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent*, 175.

Conclusion

Different groups of people throughout history have been separated involuntarily from the broader People of God. Often the separation comes because of theological argument, and there is often theological error, but sometimes it is not a case of orthodoxy versus heresy, but rather tradition of orthodoxy (sometimes mixed with corruption) vs different traditions or other movements *ad fontes* (sometimes mixed with error by nature of the process). The Waldensians were such a case. They had theological errors in their early days, but to focus on the errors would be to miss the point. The Waldensians were truly pre-reformers, and as the reformers, were “sectarized” from the Church (then the Roman Church). This was not voluntary – they did not cut themselves off from the people of God. They desired fellowship as well as reformation within the Catholic Church. But the result was their “sectarization.” However through their faithfulness, the Waldensians preserved the simplicity of the Gospel all the way until the Reformation where they were once again joined to a people—the reformed church.

The church, while not in Medieval style, is doing the same thing today. We can learn, from this historical example, multiple things to imitate as we live in the people of God. First, the Waldensian understanding of the importance of People. The lack of a people lends itself to error. This is at once the strength and weakness of the Catholic Church, for while being united under one head, they then excommunicate out of their people those who should still be among them. Secondly, the Waldensian willingness to be sectarized, if necessary, in order to keep the simplicity of the gospel and to remain faithful to Christ. This is a difficult balance to keep. Ideally a Christian sub-culture should not have to choose between remaining faithful to Christ and remaining in the community of the people of

God. The later Waldensians of the Reformation period did not have to make that choice. They had a people to which they could belong as a sub-culture, remain accountable to, and live in community with. Thirdly, the Waldensian determination, while sectarized, to remain faithful, not allowing themselves to become a “sect,” and avoiding heresy. They did this by centering all their teachings on the Word of God, and focused their community living with worship and sacraments at its center. While the name of Peter Waldo is often associated with the movement, the Waldensians did not follow “Waldo-ism” by any sense of the word. They were men of the Bible and followers of Christ.

Applications

What can be learned from all this? How, as my thesis question asked, does this relate to American denominations? Are they culture or People building? Or are they sectarian and sectarizing or un-people-ing? I believe that the Protestant church today is going through similar things as the Roman church of the tenth century. I don’t believe that our greatest concern must be that we have denominations at all (though I think that doesn’t always help matters) but rather that we don’t understand the importance or the nature of the People of God, and the role that subculture plays within that People. It is very possible, and does happen, that two denominations function in perfect unity (while maintaining their differences). It is actually the denominations that are *more* similar to each other that tend to divide in ways which do not befit the Body of Christ. While this seems absurd, it is in the nature of men that those most similar to them are the ones that are easiest to persecute, a point René Girard makes.⁸⁰ It is therefore easy for denominations which differ in small matters, often cultural, to “sectarize” one another, though one group tends to *do* the

⁸⁰ René Girard states: “In the vocabulary of tribal or national prejudices hatred is expressed, not for difference, but for its absence.” From *The Girard Reader*, 116. New York: The Cross Road Publishing Company, 2007.

sectarizing and one is normally receiving it. The Waldensians story speaks to both these camps.

To those who are tempted to sectarize (for the Waldensians, this was of course, the institutionalized Catholic Church), it is the danger of being petty, of loosing sight of the gospel, and of most of all, of loosing sight of the unity of the body *as well as* the diversity. Christ is the Savior of the entire world, and the gospel penetrates all cultures, languages, and denominations. Christ is therefore manifested in different ways. He did not create us all American, or all French, He created us as diverse humans whom He brings, by His grace, into Covenant with Him through His Church—we are the people of God. Christ called us to be one, just as He is one. Sectarizing a part of the body is a sin that the Roman church committed, and I believe, to its own destruction. Where would the Roman Church be had it not rejected the early reformers? Perhaps we would not have needed a sixteenth-century Reformation? Sectarizing is a kind of excommunication, and ought to be taken very seriously and not done hastily—to cut off a “nose” in the name of cutting off a “heretical wart” is an error that is hard to repair. True, gospel-denying heresy ought to be cut out and excommunicated from the Body of Christ, but if every person or group that had ever been *called* “heretical” were to be added up, and removed from the number of the Elect, then the Feast of the Lamb would have many empty seats.

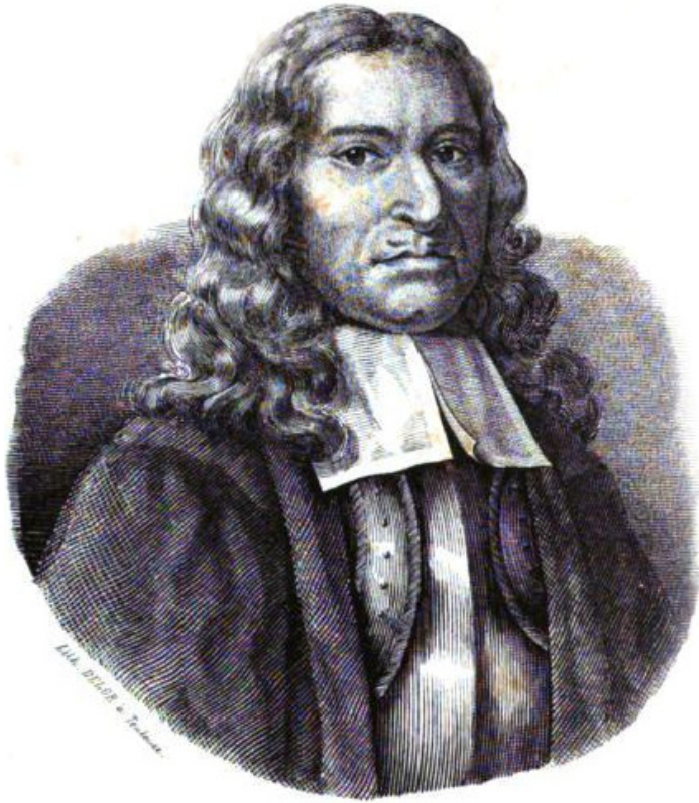
To those who are being sectarized, the temptation is often to give up, or to fall into a “Who needs *them* anyway” mentality. Here too the example of the Waldensians stands out. To the day he died, Peter Waldo had the strong desire to be re-united with the larger People of God, though he had men arguing with him that his was a lost cause. There is great benefit in being united to the larger body of Christ, and inherent dangers in being sectarized. The Waldensians, while being a sectarized group, were able to join with the Reformation so easily because they stayed faithful to the simplicity of the gospel, with the Word at the very center of their lives and community. While a very tight-knit community of believers, they were outwards turned, always seeking whom they might bring into the faith, as well as whom they might serve in the name of Christ. Lambert speaks of the Waldensians in Montauban, France who would undertake manual labor for neighbors out of a spirit of helpfulness, and gives an example of how someone in that town might go to his hairdresser and “find himself the object of a Waldensian

exhortation.”⁸¹ The gospel goes everywhere, and denominations tend to be cultural. However this is not an argument against denominations—this is an argument for a certain type of interaction *between* denominations. We are all one Holy Catholic Apostolic Church, and we are called to act as one.

Does this oneness remove the potential for differences? Is there no room for diversity, or even of theology? Does this destroy cultural aspects of the church? In the same way we might ask, does the oneness of the Godhead remove the differences of the Trinity? Quite the contrary, it upholds it. If all Christians understand that we are anchored in the same faith, then how much joy it can be to see the diversity within it. But we must also understand that the ultimate unity that is being created will only completely unveil itself at the last day. For the present moment it is as if we see the back of a cross-stitch. It’s often ugly, with all kinds of loose strings flopping about. What kind of unity is that? Eschatological. And how does it take place? Through Word and Sacrament. If we are breaking bread and drinking wine together, we will be of one mind and one body. In that context, theological differences are unifying.

*“But in fact God has arranged the parts
in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted
them to be.” (1 Cor. 12:18)*

⁸¹ Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 160.



HENRI ARNAUD

Pasteur et Chef Militaire des Vaudois.
Peint en 1691 à l'âge de 45 ans.

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Audisio is the professor of Medieval History in Aix-en-Provence, where the first major persecution of the Waldensians took place. He is, in my opinion, one of the most authoritative modern commentators on Waldensian history, having contributed a good deal of scholarship on the subject.

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Exceptionally good overview of the different sects and heresies of the Medieval period. Lambert covered the Waldensians chronologically, which was helpful in knowing where they fit in at different times in their history. Also a great source for understanding the Waldensians relation to the Cathars.

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This is my main source document. Written by the moderator of the Waldensian churches in the sixteen hundreds, Léger is considered one of the most authoritative sources on Waldensian history and theology. Also, this document is very rare, and has never been back in print since the 1600's. It is divided in two books. The

first concerning their faith and early history. The second concerning their persecution.

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Appendix

A Waldensian Confession of Faith from the Reformed Churches of the Piedmont

This confession, from the year 1655, is found on pages 112 to 114 of Léger's, *Histoire Générale*. I offer here a rough translation, taken from the old French.

We Believe:

- I. That there is only one God, who is a spiritual essence, eternal, infinite, all wise, all merciful, and all just; in one word, perfect. And that there are three Persons in that one and simple essence: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- II. That this God manifested himself to man by his works, such as Creation, such as Providence, and by his Word, revealed in the beginning by diverse strong Oracles, and then composed by writing in Books which we call the Holy Scripture.
- III. That just as we must receive the Holy Scriptures as Divine and Canonical, for the rule of our life and Faith, [so also we receive] that it is filled with Books from the Old and New Testament. From the Old testament only those Books which God committed to the Judean Church, and those that have always been recognized as Divine: to receive: the five Books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles or

Paralipomenon, 1 of Esdras,⁸² Nehemiah, Esther, Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the four major prophets and the twelve minor. And in the New [Testament]: the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul, one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, the epistle of Hebrews, one of St. James, two of St. Peter, three of St. John, one of St. Jude, and the Apocalypse [Revelation].

- IV. That we recognize the Divinity of the Sacred Books, not only by the testimony of the Church, but primarily by the eternal and indubitable truth of the Doctrine which are therein contained, [by the] excellence, sublimity, and majesty of everything Divine which are therein, and by the operation of the Holy Spirit, who makes us receive with respect the testimony which the Church gives us, who open our eyes to discover the rays of celestial light which burst in Scripture, and who rectifies our taste in order to discern this meat by the Divine savor that it is.
- V. That God made all things from nothing, by his entirely free will, and by the infinite power of his Word.
- VI. That he leads and governs all by his Providence, ordaining and addressing all that comes about in the world, that without being neither the author nor the cause of evil done by the creatures, or that culpability be able, or ought in any way to be imputed [to him.]
- VII. That the Angels having been created holy and pure, some fell in a corruption and irreparable perdition, but that the others persevered by an effect of Divine goodness, which supported and confirmed them.

⁸² "Protestant writers, after the Geneva Bible, call I and II Esdras of the Vulgate respectively Ezra and Nehemiah, and III and IV Esdras of the Vulgate respectively I and II Esdras." Source: Catholic Encyclopedia.

- VIII. That man, who was created pure and holy, in the Image of God, deprived himself by his own fault of this happy state, giving his sentiments to the captivating discourse of the Devil.
- IX. That man lost, by his transgression, the justice and holiness that he had received, incurring, with the indignation of God, death and captivity, under the power of him who has the empire of death, that is to say the Devil, to the point that his free will⁸³ became serf and slave of sin, so much that by nature all men, Jews and Gentiles, are the Children of Ire, all dead in faults and sins, and consequently incapable of having any good movement towards salvation, no even [able] to form any good thought without grace ; all their imagination and thought are but evil at all times.
- X. That all the posterity of Adam is guilty, in him, of his disobedience, infected by his corruption, and fallen in the same calamity, all the way to little Children, starting from the womb of their Mother, from where comes the name of original Sin.
- XI. That God withdraws from this corruption and damnation those persons whom he elected by his grace, in his Son Jesus Christ, leaving the others [in their corruption & damnation] by an irreproachable right of his liberty and justice.
- XII. That Jesus Christ, having been ordained by God in his eternal decree to be the only Savior and the only Head of his Body, that is the Church, bought by his own Blood, in the accomplishment of time, and offers and communicates to us all his benefits by the Gospel.
- XIII. That there are two natures in Jesus Christ, the Divine and the human, truly in one person, without confusion, without division, without separation, without change;

⁸³ Franc arbitre

each nature keeping its own distinct natures, and that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man all together.

- XIV. That God so loved the world that he gave his Son to save us by his very perfect obedience, namely by that [obedience] which he showed by suffering the damned death of the Cross, and by the victories that he won over the Devil: sin and death.
- XV. That Jesus Christ having accomplished the entire expiation of our sins by his very perfect sacrifice, once offered on the Cross, it [that expiation] cannot, nor should be reiterated under any pretext whatever.
- XVI. That the Lord Jesus having fully reconciled us to God by the Blood of the Cross, it is by his merit only, and not by our works, that we are absolved and justified before him.
- XVII. That we have union with Jesus Christ, and communion to his benefits by Faith.
- XVIII. That this Faith comes from the gracious and effective operation of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens our souls, and brings them [our souls] to press upon the grace of God, in order to apply the merit of Jesus Christ.
- XIX. That Jesus Christ is our true and only Mediator: not only of Redemption, but also of Intercession, and that by his merits and mediation we have access to the Father, in order that we might invoke with the holy confidence of being answered, without needing to have recourse to any other intercessor than him [Christ.]
- XX. That since God promised regeneration in Jesus Christ, those who are united to him by a lively Faith, ought to give themselves, and give themselves indeed, to good works.
- XXI. That good works are so necessary to the faithful, that they cannot reach the Kingdom of Heaven without doing them, being true that God prepared them in order that we might progress in them, that therefore we ought to

flee vices and give ourselves to the Christian virtues, employing fasts and all other means which can serve us to a thing so holy.

- XXII. That just as our works cannot merit [Eternal Life], our Lord will not let go [forget] to recompense them with Eternal Life, by a gracious continuation of his grace, and in virtue of the immutable constancy of the promises that he made in our regard.
- XXIII. That those who posses Eternal Life following their Faith and their good works, ought to be considered Holy and glorified, prayed for their virtues, imitated in all the beautiful actions of their life, but not adored, nor invoked, since we ought to pray to only one God through Jesus Christ.
- XXIV. That God gathered one Church in the world for the salvation of men, that it has one Head and foundation, which is Jesus Christ.
- XXV. That that Church is the company of the faithful, who having been elect of God, before the foundation of the world, and called by a holy vocation, unite to follow the Word of God, believing what he taught us, and living in his fear.
- XXVI. That this Church cannot fail, or be destroyed, but that it must be perpetual.
- XXVII. That all must *put away*⁸⁴ and stand firm in their communion.
- XXVIII. That God teaches us not only by his Word, but he also instituted the Sacraments in order to join them to his Word, as means to join us to Jesus Christ, and to communicate his benefits, and that there are but two common to all the members of the church under the New Testament, that is Baptism and the Holy Supper.

⁸⁴ “*ranger*” – not sure about translation.

XXIX. That he instituted that of Baptism as a testimony of our adoption, and that we are all washed of our sins by the Blood of Jesus Christ, and renewed in holiness of life.

XXX. That he instituted that of the Holy Supper or Eucharist, for the food of our soul, in order that by a true and lively Faith, by the incomprehensible virtue of the Holy Spirit, we actually eat his Body, and drink his Blood, and we unite very closely and inseparably to Christ, in him, and by him, we have spiritual and eternal life.

In order that all the world clearly sees our belief on this point, we add here the same terms which are embedded in our Prayer before Communion, in our liturgy, or manner of celebrating the Holy Eucharist, and in our public catechism, which are pieces that can be seen at the end of our Psalms: Here are the terms of our Prayer: *Just as our Lord not only at one time offered his Body and his Blood for the remission of our sins, but also wants to communicate [these elements] for food into eternal life, give us this grace that from true sincerity of heart and of an ardent zeal we receive of him a benefit so great, that in a certain Faith we enjoy of his Body and of his Blood, or even of him entirely.* The terms of our Liturgy are: *First of all then, we believe in his promises that Jesus Christ who is truth itself pronounced of his mouth; know then, that he wants us to truly participate in his Body and his Blood, in order that we possess him entirely in such a way that he lives in us, and us in him.* Those of our public Catechism are the same in Section 53.

XXXI. That it is necessary that the church has Pastors, judged to be well instructed, and of a good life, by those who have the right, as much to preach the Word of God, as well as administer the Sacraments, and to watch on the flock of Jesus Christ, following the ruled of a good and

holy Discipline, together with the Elders and Deacons, according to the practice of the ancient Church.

XXXII. That God established Kings and Magistrates, for the conduct of the people and that the people must be subjected and obedient in virtue of this order, *not only because of wrath, but because of conscience*, in all things which are in conformity with the Word of God, who is the King of Kings, and Lord of lords.

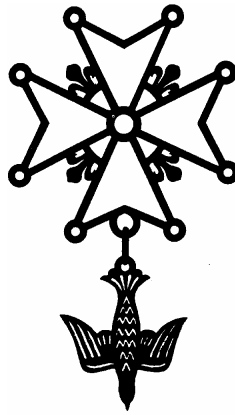
XXXIII. Finally, that Apostles Creed ought to be received, the Lord's Prayer⁸⁵, and the Decalogue, as well as the fundamental documents of our beliefs and our devotions.

And for a more ample declaration of our beliefs, we repeat here the protestation that we had printed in the year 1603. Know that we consent to the healthy Doctrine, with all the Reformed Churches of France, England, the Netherlands, Germany, of Switzerland, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, and others, as well as is expressed en their Confession of Augsburg, according to the declaration that we gave to the Author. And promising to persevere with God's help, inviolably in life and in death, being ready to sign this eternal truth of God with our own blood, as our predecessors have done since the times of the Apostles, particularly in these last centuries. And yet we very humbly pray all the Evangelical and Protestant Churches to consider us, despite/ with regards to our poverty and littleness, as true member of the mystical body of Jesus Christ, suffering for his Holy Name, and to continue to assist us in your prayer towards God, and all other good offices of your charity, as we have already abundantly experienced,

⁸⁵ *l'Oraison Dominicale*

for which we thank you in all humility which is possible to us, and beg from all our heart the Lord, that he be himself the remunerator, pouring on them [the churches] the most precious benedictions of his grace and his glory, in this life and in that which is to come.

Amen.



“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Romans 12:4-5)